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20:51 24 Mar RTRS-Parallel Arab summit meets at Beirut massacre site

By Khalid Yacoub Oweis
BEIRUT, March 24 (Reuters) - Arab human-rights activists met at Beirut's Shatila camp on Sunday to urge Arab leaders not to forget Palestinian refugees at a summit next week when they discuss a possible plan for peace with Israel.

"We convened the opening session here to show that Arab rulers must not compromise on the right of refugees," said Ziad Abdelsamad, head of the Network of Arab Development Organisations, which has 250 member groups in 12 countries.

The meeting was held at a children's centre in Shatila, one of two camps where pro-Israeli Christian militia killed hundreds of civilians during Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon.

Lebanon's 360,000 registered Palestinian refugees have been holding frequent demonstrations ahead of Wednesday and Thursday's Arab summit, demanding the right to return home.

There are some four million Palestinian refugees, mostly descendants of Palestinians displaced by Israel's creation in 1948, who live mainly in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

"Arab society is making it clear how it feels about the refugee issue," Abdelsamad said.

The Arab summit will discuss a Saudi Middle East peace plan which calls for complete Israeli withdrawal from all Arab land occupied in the 1967 Middle East war in return for full normalisation of Arab ties with Israel.

Some Arab states and Palestinian groups have criticised the Saudi initiative for vagueness on the refugee issue.

A Palestinian official told Reuters on Sunday that summit leaders would demand a "just and agreed solution that conforms to United Nations Resolution 194" for the problem of refugees.

The 1948 resolution calls for Palestinian refugees to be able to return home or be compensated should they not wish to.

HIDDEN FROM VIEW

Shatila is full of garbage heaps and without infrastructure.

A \$100 million stadium conceals it from the airport road that will carry Arab leaders to the summit in Beirut's hotel district.

Massacre survivors who have filed a war crimes case against Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in Belgium for his alleged role in the massacre were present at the meeting of Arab human rights and aid groups.

An Israeli government commission found Sharon indirectly responsible for the Sabra and Shatila camp massacres and he was forced to resign as defence minister.

Abdelsamad said his forum, being held alongside the Arab summit, will argue for prosecution of war crimes by Arabs and Israeli alike and focus on democracy, human rights and the lifting of martial law in some Arab countries.

Arab rulers, Abdelsamad said, cannot expect to discuss the plight of Palestinians under occupation while ignoring lack of democracy and the oppression in their own countries.

((Beirut editorial 9611 963895))

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